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1 — EPA approves plan to stabilize San Jacinto Waste Pits, Houston Chronicle, 10/20/17

<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/EPA-approves-plan-to-stabilize-site-of-waste-pits-12292333.php>

The Environmental Protection Agency has approved a plan to stabilize the riverbed near the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund site to address the hazards of a 20,000-square-foot area where Hurricane Harvey gouged a pit about 12 feet deep.

2 — UT/TT Poll: Most Texans happy with government response to Hurricane Harvey, Texas Tribune, 10/20/17

<https://www.texastribune.org/2017/10/20/uttt-poll-most-texans-happy-government-response-hurricane-harvey/>

Voters are generally happy with the way local, state and federal officials have responded to Hurricane Harvey, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll.

3 — Mapping NM Children's Health in Shadow of Oil, Gas Drilling, Public News Service, 10/20/17

<http://publicnewsservice.org/2017-10-20/childrens-issues/mapping-nm-childrens-health-in-shadow-of-oil-gas-drilling/a59911-1>

As the Environmental Protection Agency backs away from limiting toxic emissions from oil and gas wells, environmental groups are stepping up calls to limit the pollution.

4 — Study finds pollution is deadlier than war, disaster, hunger, AP, 10/20/17

<https://www.stripes.com/news/us/study-finds-pollution-is-deadlier-than-war-disaster-hunger-1.493434>

Environmental pollution — from filthy air to contaminated water — is killing more people every year than all war and violence in the world. More than smoking, hunger or natural disasters. More than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

5 — U.S. EPA to shrink response time for permit requests: Pruitt, Reuters, 10/19/17

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-epa-pruitt/u-s-epa-to-shrink-response-time-for-permit-requests-pruitt-idUSKBN1CP00R>

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will cut response times to permit requests to within six months by the end of 2018, part of the agency's goal to reduce regulations and delays, Administrator Scott Pruitt said on Thursday.

6 — EPA chief: Under Trump, agency is like never before, Houston Chronicle, 10/19/17

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/EPA-chief-Under-Trump-agency-is-like-never-12292376.php>

Environmental Protection Agency Chief Scott Pruitt gave a succinct message to oil and gas industry leaders Thursday night: The Trump administration's agency will be nothing like the last.

7 — Fort Worth residents may have one more thing to recycle: food scraps, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 10/19/17

<http://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/community/fort-worth/article179711816.html>

If recycling isn't on the to-do list of Fort Worth residents now, it will be. Residents can expect recycling to become an even greater part of their daily lives as the city looks to buy more time for its landfill. If nothing is done to preserve

space, the landfill in far southeast Fort Worth will run out of room in a little more than two decades, according to a recent report.

8 — EDITORIAL: Pure folly in embracing coal, San Antonio Express-News, 10/18/17

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Pure-folly-in-embracing-coal-12282403.php>

With all due respect to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, the war against coal has been over for a long time. Natural gas and renewable energy sources have won.

9 — EDITORIAL: Minnesota shows flaws of "clean power" mandates, The Oklahoman, 10/19/17

<http://newsok.com/minnesota-shows-flaws-of-clean-power-mandates/article/5568581>

RATHER than allow market forces to reign in electricity production, many green-power advocates instead support government mandates that force consumers to shift from traditional power sources to those that are supposedly better for the earth.

10 — Bergey Windpower receives federal grant, The Oklahoman, 10/19/17

<http://newsok.com/bergey-windpower-receives-federal-grant/article/5568704>

A series of federal research grants promises to help Norman's Bergey Windpower Co. lower its cost and better compete with international firms.

11 — Perry pursuing policy on coal, nuclear power at odds with Texas record, Texas Tribune, 10/20/17

<https://www.texastribune.org/2017/10/20/perrys-plan-boost-coal-and-nuclear-power-confounds-those-who-knew-him-/>

As multiple Texas coal plants wind down operations, U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry is pushing a widely decried proposal to subsidize coal and nuclear plants in the name of grid resiliency.

12 — PNM renewable plan faces hurdles, Albuquerque Journal, 10/20/17

<https://www.abqjournal.com/1080227/pnm-renewable-plan-faces-hurdles.html>

A New Mexico Public Regulation Commission hearing examiner is opposing Public Service Co. of New Mexico's plan to hire a local company to build 50 megawatts of new solar plants that PNM would own and operate.

13 — What's a prairie doing in the middle of the Medical Center?, Houston Chronicle, 10/20/17

<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/gray-matters/article/What-s-a-prairie-doing-in-the-middle-of-the-12290862.php>

Walking through the core of Houston's world-famous Texas Medical Center, something at the corner of Holcombe and Fannin might feel out of place and time: what appears to be a giant weed patch.



<http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/EPA-approves-plan-to-stabilize-site-of-waste-pits-12292333.php>

EPA approves plan to stabilize site of waste pits

By Lise Olsen Updated 11:13 pm, Thursday, October 19, 2017

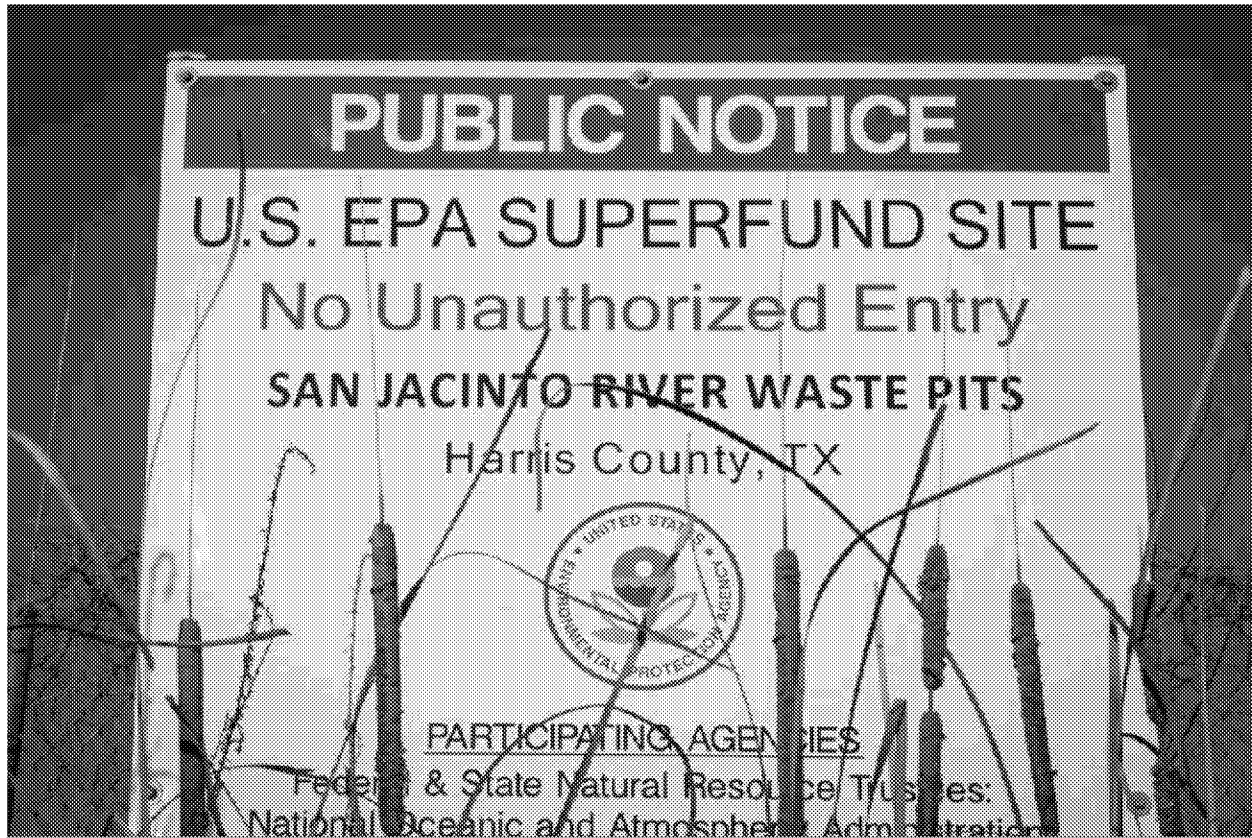


IMAGE 1 OF 4

A sign warns the public about the EPA Superfund Site not to eat contaminated seafood caught from the water along I-10 near the San Jacinto River east of Houston, Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2013, in Channelview. Texans ... [more](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency announced Thursday that it has approved a plan to stabilize the riverbed near the San Jacinto River Waste Pits Superfund site to address the hazards of a 20,000-square foot area where Hurricane Harvey gouged a pit about 12 feet deep.

At the same time, the EPA and companies responsible for the cleanup say further inspection and tests indicate that a temporary concrete cap appeared to have held during the storm and therefore a major leak of cancer-causing dioxins was averted at the site of Interstate 10 near Channelview.

The San Jacinto Waste Pits is one of 43 Superfund sites in the coastal areas affected by Hurricane Harvey. It's the only site that required additional followup and repairs, the EPA

says. The pits - which hold waste from a former paper mill - were submerged when a wall of water as high as 18 inches above normal levels flooded the river area.

On Sept. 29, the EPA ordered further testing at the Superfund site after a government dive team collected one sediment sample at the pits that tested at 70,000 micrograms per kilogram - 2,000 times higher than the EPA recommended cleanup level of 30 micrograms per kilogram.

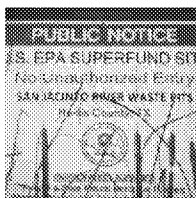
But the preliminary results of six additional sediment samples collected from the northwest corner of the site show far lower concentrations of the dioxins, ranging from only 0.02 micrograms per kilogram to 38.9 micrograms per kilogram, according to information provided Thursday to the Chronicle by companies handling the cleanup.

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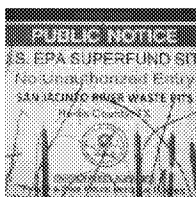
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EPA chief: Under Trump, agency is like never before



Craft: EPA administrator should see Houston's post-Harvey pollution firsthand.



Neighbors, officials praise EPA decision to clean up San Jacinto waste pits

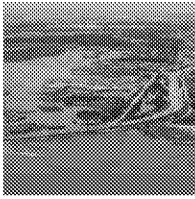
EPA OKs plan to rid toxics from waste pits

Optimistic report

Though one of those newly reported results exceeds the EPA recommended cleanup level, they are similar to levels previously found in river sediments there, the companies say.

An independent Houston-based lab tested the samples, documents show.

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"No release of dioxins or furans has occurred from the San Jacinto waste pits site as a result of Hurricane Harvey," the companies claim, based on the new sampling.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, who was visiting Houston on Thursday to meet with industry groups, recently announced that his agency is backing a plan to remove the waste pits entirely from the path of the river, partly because of damage caused by Hurricane Harvey. Various Harris County officials, environmental groups, citizen activists and members of Congress all back the proposed \$115 million removal plan.

The San Jacinto Waste pits were used into the 1960s to store waste that was taken by barge to the site from a paper mill. The site was originally on the riverbank in eastern Harris County, but over time, subsidence, dredging and construction of the Interstate Highway 10 bridge altered the path of the river and the site became partially submerged.

The pits became a federal Superfund site in 2008 and were capped in 2011 partly in response to fears of damage from hurricanes.

Companies see risks

But the companies responsible for the clean-up - McGinnis Industrial Maintenance Corp., Waste Management and International Paper Co., have said they will oppose a removal plan as too risky for the environment. The companies are likely to use their latest sediment samples to bolster an argument that reinforcing the existing cap is the best way to protect the river, its residents and the Galveston Bay itself.

"In the new sampling results, dioxins and furans were found to be well within the range of concentrations of these toxins measured in sediment in the area prior to Hurricane Harvey and found in background levels generally in the San Jacinto River," the statement says.

However, additional samples of water and sediments are still being tested and preliminary results of the water samples appear to confirm that there was a leak, said Rock Owens, an assistant Harris County attorney, who was briefed on some of the ongoing work Thursday.

Scott Jones, director of advocacy of the Galveston Bay Foundation, argued that the tests were conducted weeks after the storm and that the companies still lack data needed to assure the public whether dioxin escaped or contaminated sediments migrated at the height of the flooding.

He and others also remain concerned about the vulnerability of the cap to future storms.

Jones said he fears the storm likely disturbed "hot spots" of dioxins that already had traveled from the pits into other parts of the ecosystem and been mapped by local researchers from the University of Houston.

"You can try to sample after the fact, but you can't collect what has been released at the time," he said.

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UT/TT Poll: Most Texans happy with government response to Hurricane Harvey

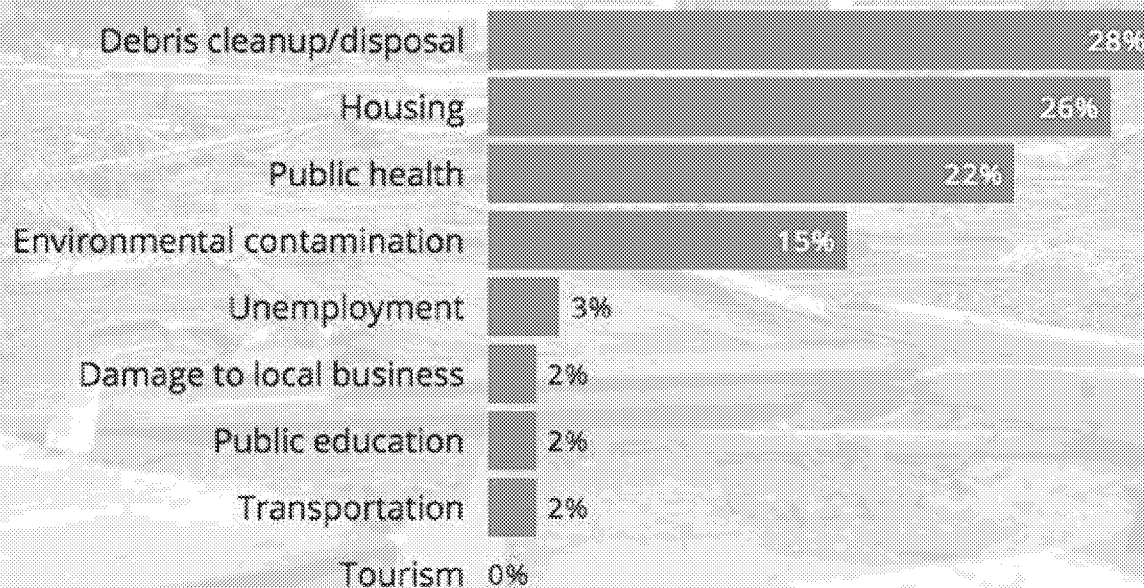
Voters are generally happy with the way local, state and federal officials have responded to Hurricane Harvey, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll.

BY ROSS RAMSEY OCT. 20, 2017 9 HOURS AGO



UT/TT POLL

Most important post-Harvey problem?



Graphic by Bryant Ju and Ryan Murphy

For Hurricane Harvey recovery, Texans want federal, state and local officials to focus on debris cleanup and disposal, housing, public health and environmental contamination, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll.

Texas voters said other problems brought on by the historic storm — transportation, somewhat important to them, but their first priorities are cleaning up and making sure everyone is okay.

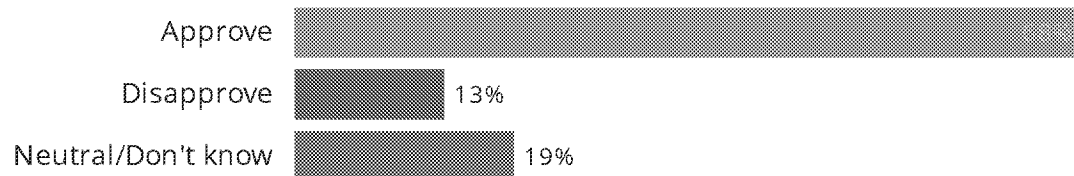
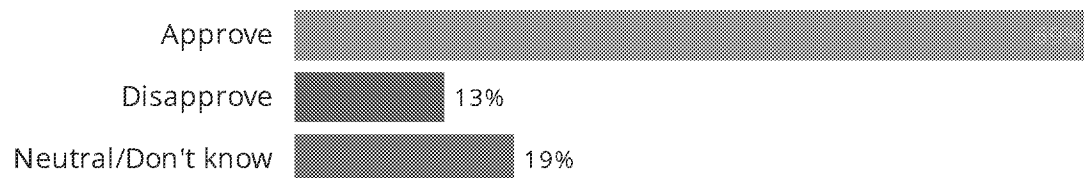
That showed in their assessments of how others responded to the effects of the storm: 86 percent lauded the response of the people of Texas, and large majorities thought highly of the actions of local and state governments. The federal government's responses won approval from 57 percent of the respondents.

"Texans love how Texans did," said Jim Henson, co-director of the poll and head of the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas at Austin. He said Republicans and Democrats alike approved of local government responses but that Republicans were much more likely than Democrats to approve of the state and federal government responses. "They were far more positive," he said.

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Voters were less impressed with the news media — 47 percent approved of the media's response to the storms while 30 percent disapproved — and with insurance companies. A majority had neutral or no opinion about insurance companies' responses; a fuller ruling on that will probably follow experiences with damage claims.

UT/TT POLL

Judge the Hurricane Harvey response from ...**Federal government****State government****Local government****People of Texas**

More than two of every five Texas voters said they or someone close to them was directly affected by Hurricane Harvey.

Voters were divided when asked whether federal relief should be available in the future for people who rebuild homes in frequently flooded areas. Democrats (49 percent) were more likely to say yes to that than Republicans (32 percent). Black voters (53 percent) and Hispanic voters (49 percent) were more likely to answer yes than white voters (31 percent). Tea Party Republicans were the most likely to oppose future federal relief for those who rebuild in flood-prone areas; 60 percent don't like that idea.

Did climate change contribute to the severity of recent hurricanes that hit Texas, Louisiana, Florida and Puerto Rico? Yes, according to 45 percent of voters; no, said 42 percent. And the answers to that question were closely linked to the political preferences of the respondents. Among Republicans, 16 percent said climate change worsened the storms while 72 percent said it didn't. Among Democrats, the answers flipped: 80 percent yes, 8 percent no. Independents were more like Republicans, but more evenly divided: 37 percent said yes, 46 percent said no.

“It’s fascinating that age, education and other such variables are swamped by ideology here,” said Daron Shaw, co-director of the poll and a government professor at UT-Austin. “I think what has happened is that this is an issue where the debate (and the science surrounding it) get politicized such that party cues dominate the perceptions of voters. On issues directly involving government spending and/or regulation — even those where scientific expertise is an obvious factor — ideology is much more readily tied to attitudes.”

The high approval ratings for state and local government come at a time of some tension between those institutions. The Texas Legislature earlier this year debated a considerable number of bills that would have constrained local governments and/or asserted state control over issues often handled locally. But when it comes to issues of trust — whether government is careful or careless with tax dollars, or addresses or ignores the needs of Texans — voters didn’t make much distinction between the state and local regimes.

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That said, they didn’t exactly fawn over either source of authority: Voters were more likely to say state government is more careful handling tax dollars, but only a minority said either government was mostly careful. Similarly, less than half of voters said state or local government mostly addresses the needs of Texans.

“Your attitudes on federalism are closely tied to which level of government shares your partisan and ideological orientation. There is evidence of that here,” Shaw said. “The overall ambivalence of the numbers reflects two contradictory facts: Most voters are suspicious of government and its ability to work effectively, but most voters in Texas have conservative representation at the state and local levels, which makes them feel somewhat better about their elected officials.”

Tea Party voters skewed those numbers in favor of the state government, Henson said. “72 percent of Tea Party Republicans say state government is careful with tax dollars — a clear indication that the message [from Austin] is resonating with its intended target.”

UT/TT POLL

Governments' handling of tax dollars**State****Local**

UT/TT POLL

Governments' responses to residents' needs**State****Local**

The University of Texas/Texas Tribune internet survey of 1,200 registered voters was conducted from October 6 to October 15 and has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.83 percentage points. Numbers in charts might not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

This is one of several stories on the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll. Earlier: [Texans grade President Trump](#), his qualities and his response to top issues; and voters rate the [top figures and institutions](#) in state politics. Coming Monday: Texans' views on immigration, healthcare and other issues.

Disclosure: The University of Texas at Austin has been a financial supporter of The Texas Tribune. A complete list of Tribune donors and sponsors can be viewed [here](#).

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- In the Texas Senate's first public hearing since Hurricane Harvey, officials talked for hours about a host of pricey options to mitigate flooding related to stressed reservoirs in the Houston region. [\[Full story\]](#)

- Almost a year after his 2016 election, President Donald Trump's support among Texas Republicans remains robust. Among Democratic voters, it's just the opposite, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll. [\[Full story\]](#)
- With a year to go before the general election, incumbent U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz is much better known than Democratic rival Beto O'Rourke, according to the latest University of Texas/Texas Tribune Poll. [\[Full story\]](#)

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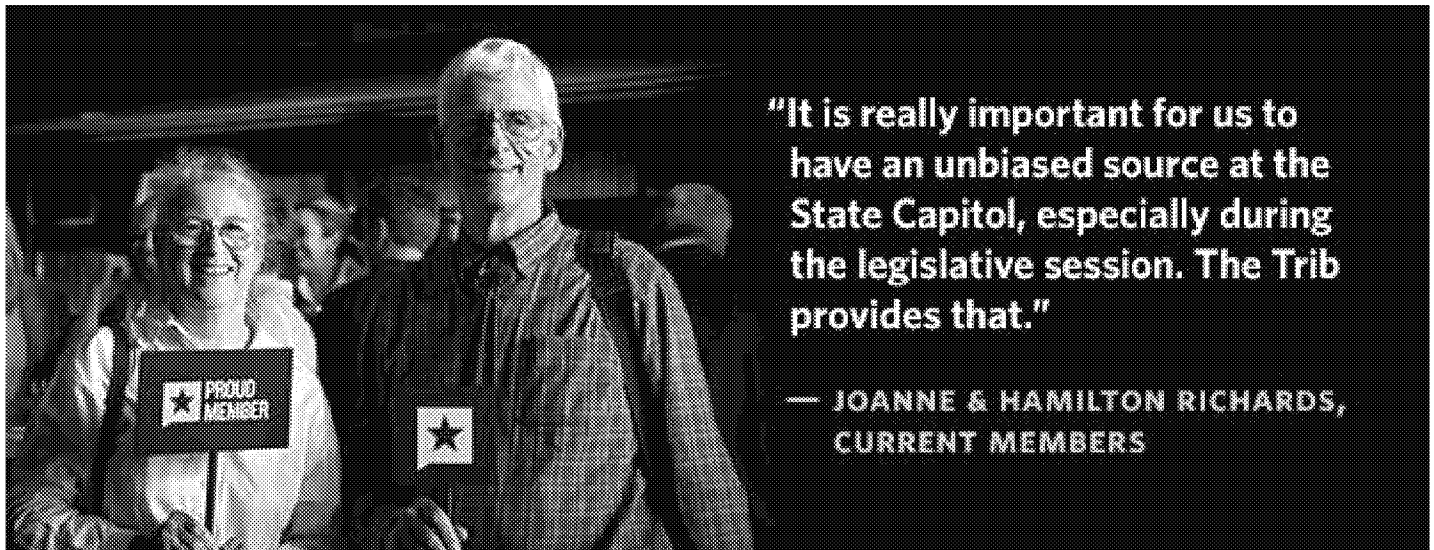
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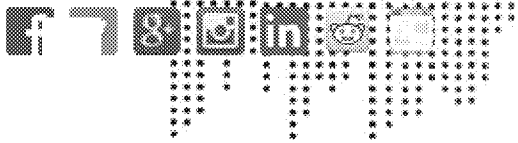
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Mapping NM Children's Health in Shadow of Oil, Gas Drilling



Environmental watchdogs say about 32,000 New Mexico children attend schools and daycare centers within a half-mile of oil and gas production facilities. (fracktracker.org)



October 20, 2017

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. – As the Environmental Protection Agency backs away from limiting toxic emissions from oil and gas wells, environmental groups are stepping up calls to limit the pollution.

The groups Earthworks and Moms Clean Air Force have released an updated version of their interactive Oil and Gas Threat Map. It identifies areas at risk from emissions from oil and gas production.

Alexandra Merlino with Moms Clean Air Force says New Mexico is vulnerable without federal laws governing oil and gas because the state lacks guidelines for determining what constitutes a significant violation.

"In New Mexico, because we have no state regulations around oil and gas, we depend on national regulations - that's like our health check," she says.

Merlino points out that EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is working to roll back Obama-era rules that reduce methane emissions, though the effort is currently tied up in the courts. The map reveals potential danger to schools and childcare centers near rigs that can emit methane, volatile organic compounds and other pollutants.

According to the map, more than 32,000 children in New Mexico attend schools and daycare centers located near oil and gas production facilities. These sites release methane, a potent greenhouse gas, as well as smog-forming and cancer-causing pollution, like benzene. Merlino says this puts kids at risk for cancer, respiratory illness, birth defects, blood disorders and neurological problems.

"So, it's not only the direct threat of this oil and gas pollution, and then there's the secondary impact of climate destruction from this pollution that then creates other issues that are health risks to young children," she warns.

New Mexico has two major oil and production areas where children might be exposed to risk - the San Juan Basin and the Permian Basin. A study by the Fracktracker Alliance in 2014 found that hydraulic fracturing and oil and gas drilling in the U.S. unfairly burden Hispanic and non-white communities.

Roz Brown, Public News Service - NM

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Study finds pollution is deadlier than war, disaster, hunger



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A barbed-wire fence encircles the Highlands Acid Pit that was flooded by water from the nearby San Jacinto River as a result from Harvey in Highlands, Texas, on Aug. 31, 2017.

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By KATY DAIGLE | Associated Press | Published: October 20, 2017

NEW DELHI — Environmental pollution — from filthy air to contaminated water — is killing more people every year than all war and violence in the world. More than smoking, hunger or natural disasters. More than AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined.

One out of every six premature deaths in the world in 2015 — about 9 million — could be attributed to disease from toxic exposure, according to a major study released Thursday in the Lancet medical journal. The financial cost from pollution-related death, sickness and welfare is equally massive, the report says, costing some \$4.6 trillion in annual losses — or about 6.2 percent of the global economy.

"There's been a lot of study of pollution, but it's never received the resources or level of attention as, say, AIDS or climate change," said epidemiologist Philip Landrigan, dean of global health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, and the lead author on the report.

The report marks the first attempt to pull together data on disease and death caused by all forms of pollution combined.

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"Pollution is a massive problem that people aren't seeing because they're looking at scattered bits of it," Landrigan said.

Experts say the 9 million premature deaths the study found was just a partial estimate, and the number of people killed by pollution is undoubtedly higher and will be quantified once more research is done and new methods of assessing harmful impacts are developed.

Areas like Sub-Saharan Africa have yet to even set up air pollution monitoring systems.

Soil pollution has received scant attention. And there are still plenty of potential toxins still being ignored, with less than half of the 5,000 new chemicals widely dispersed throughout the environment since 1950 having been tested for safety or toxicity.

"In the West, we got the lead out of the gasoline, so we thought lead was handled. We got rid of the burning rivers, cleaned up the worst of the toxic sites. And then all of those discussions went into the background" just as industry began booming in developing nations, said Richard Fuller, head of the global toxic watchdog Pure Earth and one of the 47 scientists, policy makers and public health experts who contributed to the 51-page report.

"To some extent these countries look to the West for examples and discussion, and we'd dropped it," Fuller said.

Asia and Africa are the regions putting the most people at risk, the study found, while India tops the list of individual countries.

ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW ∨

One out of every four premature deaths in India in 2015, or some 2.5 million, was attributed to pollution. China's environment was the second deadliest, with more than 1.8 million premature deaths, or one in five, blamed on pollution-related illness, the study found.

Several other countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, North Korea, South Sudan and Haiti also see nearly a fifth of their premature deaths caused by pollution.

Still, many poorer countries have yet to make pollution control a priority, experts say. India has taken some recent actions, such as tightening vehicle and factory emission standards and occasionally limiting the number of cars on New Delhi's roads. But they have done little about crop burning, garbage fires, construction dust or rampant use of the dirtiest fossil fuels.

A court ban on firework sales before the Diwali festival didn't stop New Delhi residents from firing rockets and lighting crackers throughout Thursday night. They awoke Friday morning to acrid, smoke-filled skies and levels of dangerous, lung-clogging particulate matter known as PM2.5 that went beyond 900 parts per million — 90 times the recommended limit by the World Health Organization, and 22 times higher than India's own limits.

"Even though better pollution norms are coming in, still the pollution levels are continuously increasing," said Shambhavi Shukla, a research associate with the Delhi-based Center for Science and Environment, which was not involved in the Lancet study.

To reach its figures on the overall global pollution burden, the study's authors used methods outlined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for assessing field data from soil tests, as well as with air and water pollution data from the Global Burden of Disease, an ongoing study run by institutions including the World Health Organization and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.

Even the conservative estimate of 9 million pollution-related deaths is one-and-a-half times higher than the number of people killed by smoking, three times the number killed by AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined, more than six times the number killed in road accidents, and 15 times the number killed in war or other forms of violence, according to GBD tallies.

It is most often the world's poorest who suffer, the study found. The vast majority of pollution-related deaths — 92 percent — occur in low- or middle-income countries, where policy makers are chiefly concerned with developing their economies, lifting people out of poverty and building basic infrastructure. Environmental regulations in those countries tend to be weaker, and industries lean on outdated technologies and dirtier fuels.

In wealthier countries where overall pollution is not as rampant, it is still the poorest communities that are more often exposed, the report says.

"What people don't realize is that pollution does damage to economies. People who are sick or dead cannot contribute to the economy. They need to be looked after" — which is also costly, Fuller said.

"There is this myth that finance ministers still live by, that you have to let industry pollute or else you won't develop," he said. "It just isn't true."

The report cites EPA research showing that the U.S. has gained some \$30 in benefits for every dollar spent on controlling air pollution since 1970, when Congress enacted the Clean Air Act, one of the world's most ambitious environmental laws. Removing lead from gasoline has earned the U.S. economy another \$6 trillion cumulatively since 1980, according to studies by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some experts cautioned, however, that the report's economic message was murky. Reducing the pollution quantified in the report might impact production, and so would not likely translate into gains equal to the \$4.6 trillion in economic losses.

The report "highlights the social and economic justice of this issue," said Marc Jeuland, associate professor with the Sanford School of Public Policy and the Duke Global Health Institute at Duke University, who was not involved in the study.

Without more concrete evidence for how specific policies might lead to economic gains, "policy makers will often find it difficult to take action, and this report thus only goes part way in making the case for action," he said.

Jeuland also noted that, while the report counts mortality by each pollutant, there are possible overlaps — for example, someone exposed to both air pollution and water contamination — and actions to address one pollutant may not reduce mortality.

"People should be careful not to extrapolate from the U.S. numbers on net (economic) benefits, because the net effects of pollution control will not be equivalent across locations," he said.


The study's conclusions on the economic cost of pollution measure lost productivity and health care costs, while also considering studies measuring people's "willingness to pay" to reduce the probability of dying. While these types of studies yield estimates at best, they are used by

many governments and economists trying to understand how societies value individual lives.

While there has never been an international declaration on pollution, the topic is gaining traction.

The World Bank in April declared that reducing pollution, in all forms, would now be a global priority. And in December, the United Nations will host its first conference on the topic of pollution.


"The relationship between pollution and poverty is very clear," said Ernesto Sanchez-Triana, lead environmental specialist at the World Bank. "And controlling pollution would help us address many other problems, from climate change to malnutrition. The linkages can't be ignored."

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U.S. EPA to shrink response time for permit requests: Pruitt

Ernest Scheyder, Bryan Sims



THE WOODLANDS, Texas (Reuters) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will cut response times to permit requests to within six months by the end of 2018, part of the agency's goal to reduce regulations and delays, Administrator Scott Pruitt said on Thursday.

FILE PHOTO: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt attends during a summit of Environment ministers from the G7 group of industrialised nations in Bologna, Italy, June 11, 2017. REUTERS/Max Rossi

The move comes as President Donald Trump pushes to shrink the size of government and cut regulations, especially on the coal and oil sectors.

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“Regulatory uncertainty is the biggest reason why the U.S. economy isn’t growing faster,” Pruitt said in a panel discussion at the Texas Oil & Gas Association’s Lone Star Energy Forum just outside Houston.

The EPA has in some cases taken several years to review some permit requests. Pruitt said cutting that response time was a key goal when he took office earlier this year, a task he delegated to Henry Darwin, his chief of staff and a former staffer at the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

“It can be done. It’s just a matter of having the process in place to achieve results,” said Pruitt, the former Oklahoma attorney general.

Environmentalists have consistently challenged Pruitt’s decisions atop the EPA, saying the agency is rushing

approval of some projects that could harm the environment.

In his remarks to the crowd of oil and gas executives, Pruitt said he did not see his role as having to choose between the economy or environmental stewardship.

“One of the greatest challenges we have as a country is to ask the question, ‘What is true environmentalism?’” Pruitt said. “Why can’t we be about jobs and growth and environmental stewardship?”

Earlier this month Pruitt issued a notice that the agency intended to repeal the Clean Power Plan, which it said relied on controversial calculations of economic costs and benefits. Ending the rule could save \$33 billion in regulatory costs, the EPA estimated.

Pruitt said he did not believe the EPA had the authority to regulate how electricity is generated under the Clean Air Act, although former President Barack Obama’s administration had taken the opposite approach.

The U.S. Congress, Pruitt said, should tell him how to proceed, vowing to take no action on the issue without legislative approval.

“If Congress hasn’t given us the authority to do something, we can’t do it,” he said. “If they want to give us authority to regulate certain areas, they need to be specific and tell us.”

EPA chief: Under Trump, agency is like never before

By Alex Stuckey | October 19, 2017 | Updated: October 19, 2017 10:09pm

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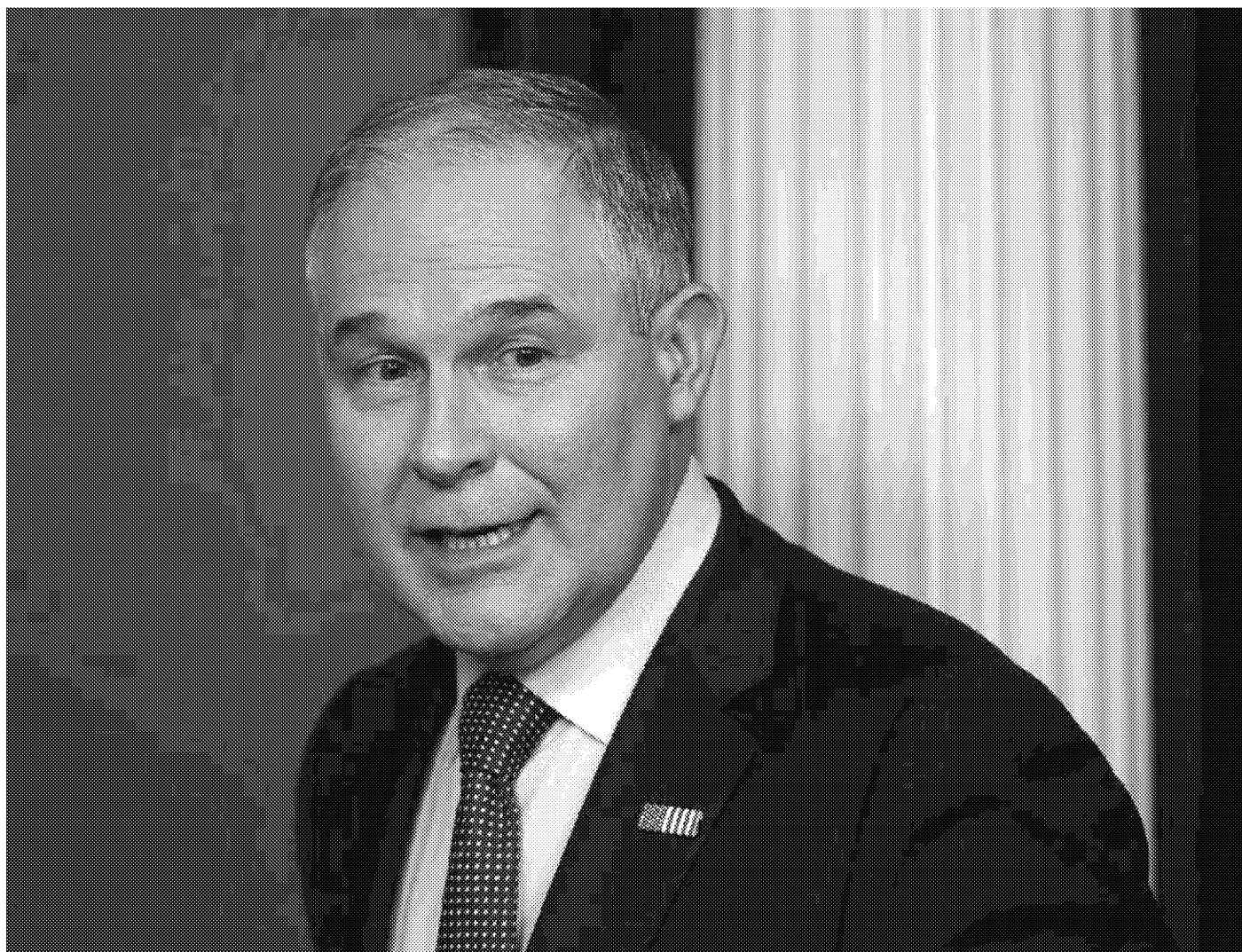


Photo: Pablo Martinez Monsivais, STF

FILE - In this June 2, 2017 file photo, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt looks back after speaking to the media during the daily briefing in the Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House in Washington. Top-ranking Congressional Democrats are calling on a federal watchdog to review whether Pruitt broke the law by making a video for a private group opposing an Obama-era clean-water rule. Pruitt flew to Colorado for an August event organized by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, an industry trade association representing cattle producers. While at the ranch, Pruitt recorded a video urging the group's members to file comments supporting the repeal of EPA's Waters of the United States rule. (AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais)

Environmental Protection Agency Chief Scott Pruitt gave a succinct message to oil and gas industry leaders Thursday night: The Trump administration's agency will be nothing like the last.

President Donald Trump and his cabinet members are "focused on results and that's been the primary focus of my first months at the EPA," Pruitt said. "We're establishing metrics and benchmarks and performance standards in key areas of what we do."

Pruitt spoke Thursday night during the Texas Oil and Gas Association's annual Lone Star Energy Forum in The Woodlands, answering questions for about 30 minutes from the association's president, Todd Staples.

As an example of quick action, he pointed to the San Jacinto Waste Pits. After years of waiting for the area to be cleaned up, Pruitt said, he came in mid-September and promised an answer by Oct. 14. On Oct. 11, the EPA approved a plan to permanently remove tons of toxics from the waste pits.

'Getting back to basics'

TRANSLATOR

Prior to his discussion Thursday night, Pruitt said he met with community members and environmental advocates about the San Jacinto Waste Pits. He said they were thanking him for acting quickly.

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"We're getting back to basics, focused on our core mission, focused on results," he said.

Earlier in the day, about a dozen environmental advocates gathered at the old Brady's Landing restaurant to protest Pruitt's appearance at the association's meeting. Pruitt, they said, should take a "toxic tour" of their neighborhoods, rather than speak to oil and gas leaders.

During Thursday's talk, Pruitt talked about working with Trump - whom he called a courageous man of action - as well as his plans to act faster on Superfund site and permitting decisions.

Staples questioned Pruitt about the clean power plan, which Pruitt decided to withdraw earlier this month. Pruitt said he believed the last administration used it to start a war on coal or fossil fuels.

"I don't believe it's the role of the EPA to pick winners and losers," he said. "I don't think it's the role of the EPA to say here's what you should choose ... they should use all forms of electricity ... based upon what? Stability and costs."

Pruitt said the agency is evaluating its options to replace the plan under current law, but cannot do anything Congress has not already authorized it to do.

"Our job is to follow the law, we can't make it up," he said. "That was novel to the last administration, it's fundamental to this administration."

This has caused regulatory and financial uncertainty both in the energy and health care sectors, he said.

"The greatest impact on the low percentage of growth is regulatory uncertainty because you have regulators acting in ways that's untethered to statute," he said.

Partnerships sought

He also noted his agency's commitment to a transparent rule-making process that involves the public and not the courts. Pruitt also spoke about the importance of partnership between all environmental stakeholders, including the energy industry.

"We've been told as a nation that true environmentalism is do not touch," Pruitt said. "That's simply false ... as a country we've always been about using the natural resources that God blessed us with to feed the world, to power the world, to grow our economy."

This will be done with future generations in mind, he said, ensuring the safety and health of U.S. citizens as they are used. He noted energy industry leaders care about the water they drink and the air they breathe.

"Are there bad actors out there? Absolutely," he said. "We're going to prosecute bad actors, but we shouldn't start by saying (certain people) don't care about these issues. You do."

Fort Worth may have one more thing to recycle: food scraps

BY SANDRA BAKER
sabaker@star-telegram.com

OCTOBER 19, 2017 11:22 AM

FORT WORTH If recycling isn't on the to-do list of Fort Worth residents now, it will be.

Residents can expect recycling to become an even greater part of their daily lives as the city looks to buy more time for its landfill. If nothing is done to preserve space, the landfill in far southeast Fort Worth will run out of room in a little more than two decades, according to a recent report.

Some of the ideas are simple, like enforcing bulk and brush separation for curbside collection so that the brush can always be recycled, and asking people to separate their glass and bringing it to drop off locations. Another recommendation is to not allow grass clippings in the landfill, which would save tens of thousands of tons of waste, the report said.

And following in the footsteps of several large cities, the city will consider recycling food scraps. It would first conduct a pilot program to work out logistics, but residents would be asked to save food scraps, either in compost bags or plastic containers, which would be collected and used to make fertilizer.

"We haven't selected the neighborhood or how it's going to get collected," said Brandon Bennett, the city's code compliance director, the department that oversees solid waste services. "This is juicy stuff. You don't want to be leaking chicken grease down the street."

Moreover, access to recycling at public venues and at apartment communities needs to be encouraged, and residents should be allowed to recycle old clothes at the curbside.

All this is coming because city officials are concerned that the population growth rate, combined with an increase in construction and demolition materials being brought to the landfill, will drag down its life faster than they want.

Fort Worth is the fastest-growing big city in the country. The population grew 29 percent since 2006, to 854,113. It is expected to become the nation's 12th-largest city by 2019.

In 2011, estimates were that it would take 50 years for the landfill to run out of space. It now stands about about 22 years, said a consultant's report, *Rethinking Waste For a Green Fort Worth*, a 20-year solid waste management plan that offers dozens of recommendations.

"We're not in a crisis. We want to avoid a crisis," Bennett said. "It is to some degree a wake-up call for those who are not participating in the recycling program, or those who do and could recycle more, because the better job we do at recycling, the longer the life of the landfill."

That can be done by encouraging customers to use smaller garbage carts and larger recycling carts, the report said.

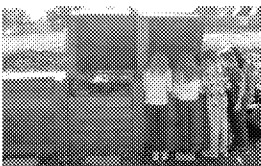
Recycling incentives

Recycling will impact peoples' pocketbooks, Bennett said.

"When we look at a rate increase, we're looking at a way to reward those that recycle more," he said. "For those who recycle less, they would pay a higher premium for filling up the landfill quicker. If we reward those that recycle more then you're going to see our recycle rate go up."

The city owns the landfill, just south of Interstate 20 off Dick Price Road, but it's operated by Republic Services. Nearly 234,000 tons of waste is collected annually from more than 217,000 residential customers. That averages a little more than 41 pounds per household, but of that, only about 9 pounds is recycled.

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Fort Worth's new waste management plan isn't rubbish



Last of Fort Worth's abandoned wastewater treatment plant being razed soon

Arlington residents encouraged to recycle leaves, not trash them



The city also operates four drop-off stations for residents to bring trash, recyclables and household chemicals and paint.

Fort Worth's recycling goals are aggressive. By 2037, the city wants to divert at least 60 percent of the collected garbage from going to the landfill, and 80 percent by 2045.

Fort Worth started curbside recycling in 1991 with small bins. By 2003, residents were given carts, one for recycling and one for garbage. Before 2003, the city diverted 7 percent of waste from the landfill. Today, it's about 21 percent.

Business involvement

Fort Worth wants more businesses to recycle, as well. Placing manageable recycling carts in business offices for paper is one way, Bennett said. A team of four employees will begin visiting businesses, much like a sales team, to get them on board with recycling, he said.

Residential waste only comprises about one third of all of the waste generated within the city, while industrial, commercial and institutional waste comprises the remaining two-thirds. The landfill could be extended by as much as 10 years if much of that material is recycled.

"Based on our last study, 28 percent of what's going the landfill can be recycled; it just isn't," said Robert Smouse, Fort Worth's assistant director of solid waste services.

The city of Arlington, which also owns its landfill, has about 48 years before it fills up, while Grand Prairie has about 41 years left on its landfill and Irving, 67 years, the report shows.

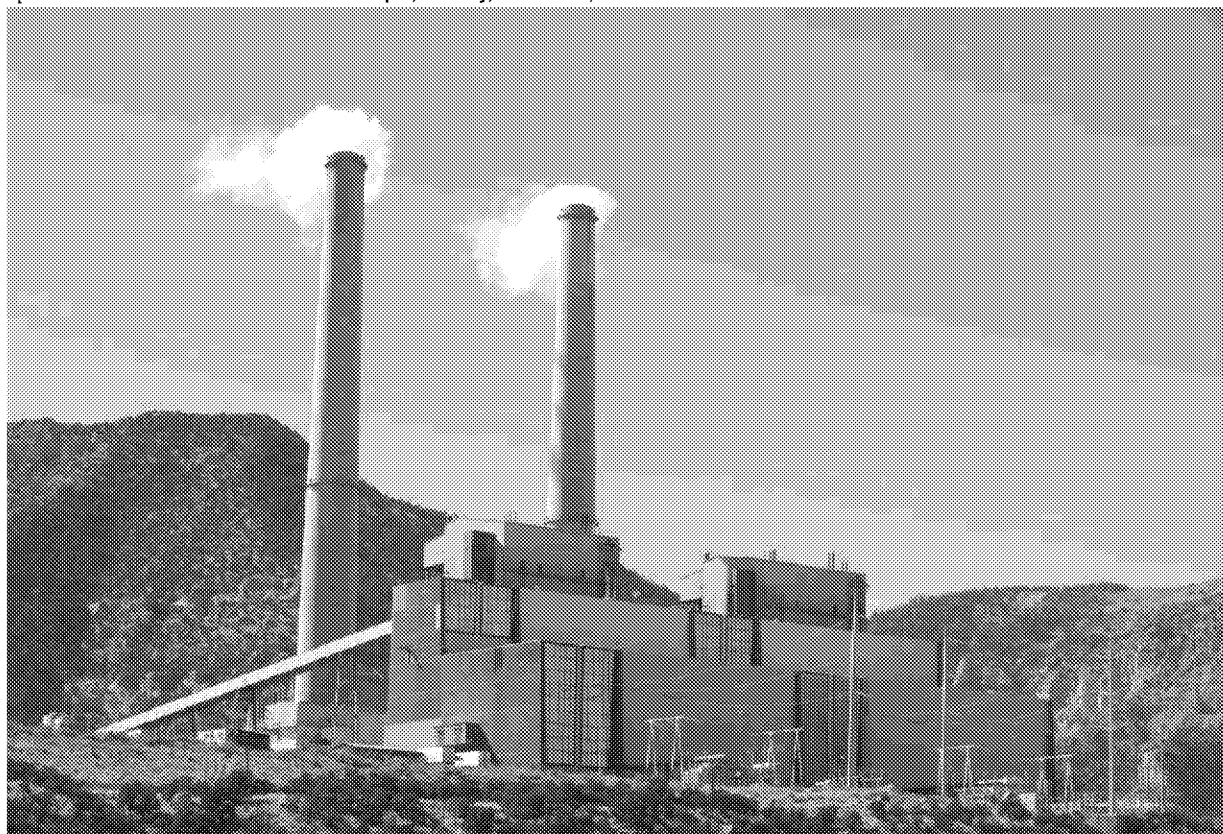
Bennett said enough changes can be made in the next two decades to slow the pace of the landfill, including partnering with other cities.

"We're not the only one whose landfill is filling up," he said.

 <http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/editorials/article/Pure-folly-in-embracing-coal-12282403.php>

Pure folly in embracing coal

Express-News Editorial Board Published 4:25 pm, Monday, October 16, 2017



Emissions rise from smoke stacks at PacifiCorp's 1000 megawatt coal fired power plant on Oct. 9 outside Huntington, Utah. The Trump administration's EPA is repealing the Clean Power Plan, that was put in place by the Obama administration. Critics say this signals a retreat from needed U.S. leadership on climate change.

With all due respect to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, the war against coal has been over for a long time. Natural gas and renewable energy sources have won.

In announcing the formal repeal of the Clean Power Plan, which has been a dead plan walking since the 2016 presidential election, Pruitt chose to speak directly to coal workers, giving his speech in Kentucky.

"The war against coal is over," he declared.

This is pure folly on so many levels. Not only does it ignore the clear reality that carbon emissions are linked to climate change, it also ignores market forces. Natural gas prices are so low, and are projected to remain low for so long, that coal has become obsolete as an energy source. The cost of renewable energy will continue to fall.

With or without the Clean Power Plan, the coal industry, which, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employs about 52,000 people, isn't coming back. So, the Trump administration is undercutting emerging technology and American global leadership to curb climate change — to appease an industry whose product can't compete in the marketplace.

That's demoralizing, as was President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement. To turn away from the reality of climate science is to turn away from American leadership, ingenuity and wherewithal. It is to turn away from the world.

The decision to repeal the Clean Power Plan will continue in the courts for years — quite possibly outlasting the Trump administration. As the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled, the EPA is required to regulate carbon

dioxide emissions under the Clean Air Act. And the EPA has previously found carbon dioxide emissions are dangerous to public health. Pruitt could reverse this, but he would need scientific evidence.

Pruitt will also have to develop a replacement rule. He could propose an ersatz rule that is so loose it does nothing to curb carbon emissions. But that, too, would almost certainly end up in court.

For industry, which craves regulatory certainty, this is a nightmare. There is no regulatory plan, and whatever flexibility and relief utilities gain from Pruitt's actions could boomerang under another administration after Trump — one that puts forward far more stringent regulations on carbon emissions than the Clean Power Plan.

Here's the clear reality: The Trump administration is sacrificing American leadership, and flirting with climate disaster, to support a fossil fuel drifting into obsolescence.

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HEARST

Minnesota shows flaws of "clean power" mandates



by The Oklahoman Editorial Board • Published: October 19, 2017 12:00 AM CDT • Updated: October 19, 2017 12:00 AM CDT

RATHER than allow market forces to reign in electricity production, many green-power advocates instead support government mandates that force consumers to shift from traditional power sources to those that are supposedly better for the earth. The result of such command-and-control efforts in Minnesota should be a warning for other states.

In a recent report, the Center of the American Experiment, a conservative think tank in Minnesota, examined the outcomes experienced there when lawmakers mandated greater use of wind power.

“This report evaluates Minnesota’s energy policy and reaches five main findings that buttress one conclusion: Minnesota’s aspirational energy policy is a grand exercise in virtue signaling that does little to reduce either conventional pollution or greenhouse gas emissions,” write Steven F. Hayward and Peter J. Nelson.

Minnesota law sets out specific state energy goals, calling for greenhouse gas emissions to be 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2015, 30 percent by 2025, and 80 percent by 2050. To achieve those goals, Minnesota law requires utilities to generate 25 percent to 30 percent of electricity from renewable sources, primarily wind.

The associated costs are not insignificant. An estimated \$10 billion has been spent in pursuit of those goals. What environmental benefits have Minnesotans received in return? Not much.

While carbon dioxide emissions declined 6.6 percent from 2005 to 2014 in Minnesota, that was “one-third less than the decline experienced by the nation as a whole,” Hayward and Nelson point out. If you examine records only since 2009, “the state has made little to no progress on emissions even as electricity generation by wind increased by 92 percent.”

In fact, Hayward and Nelson write that “carbon dioxide emissions from the electricity sector in 2014 were the same as they were in 1990 when there was virtually *no* wind power in the state.” (Emphasis in original.)


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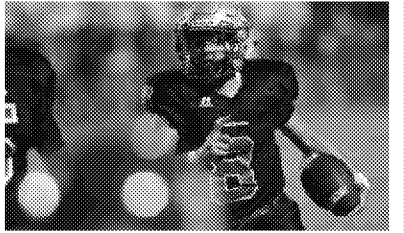
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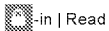
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That failure is notable since electricity consumption in Minnesota has been relatively flat. Its 2025 Energy Action Plan, released in August 2016, conceded, “If Minnesota continues on its current trajectory, the state will fall short of its greenhouse gas reduction goals and overall renewable energy goals.”

While wind-power mandates have had little impact on emissions, they appear to have impacted prices. Between 1990 and 2009, the retail price of electricity in Minnesota was, on average, 18.2 percent lower than the national average. That price advantage has since disappeared. February 2017 was the first month the average retail price of electricity in Minnesota was higher than the U.S. price. Over seven years, the price increase translated into \$4.4 billion more paid by consumers.

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Had Minnesota lawmakers really wanted to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, Hayward and Nelson argue, policymakers should have promoted a shift to cleaner natural gas-fired power plants, not wind power. Of course, that would have provided politicians with little environmental cachet, regardless of the environmental results.

In contrast to Minnesota, Oklahoma has no “clean power” mandates. That's as it should be. If consumers want wind power and are willing to pay more for it, fine. But Minnesota's experience shows that political mandates remain more likely to penalize consumers than improve the environment.



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Bergey Windpower receives federal grant



by Adam Wilmoth • Published: October 20, 2017 5:00 AM CDT • Updated: October 20, 2017 5:00 AM CDT



Norman-based Bergey Windpower Co. expects early next year to begin delivering its new 15-kilowatt turbines, which produce twice the power as its current 10-kilowatt units for about 10 percent more in cost. [PHOTO PROVIDED]

NORMAN — A series of federal research grants promises to help Norman's Bergey Windpower Co. lower its cost and better compete with international firms.

The U.S. Department of Energy this week announced that Bergey has received one of six new contracts totaling \$1.49 million awarded by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory's Distributed Wind Competitiveness Improvement Project designed to help make small-scale wind power more affordable.

Distributed electricity refers to small-scale power generated at a

home or business, as opposed to large-scale projects owned by electric utilities.

Bergey President Mike Bergey said his company will use the almost \$249,000 grant to help develop a new tower design that will allow customers to install a Bergey home wind system without the need for a concrete base.

"We project that the new foundation will save about 11 percent of the cost of installation," Bergey said. "If you can install our wind turbines without having to pour concrete in a rural area, you can save money."

The grant follows on two other Department of Energy investments totaling about \$280,000 that helped the company upgrade its turbine. Bergey expects to begin delivering its first new 15 kilowatt turbine in the first quarter of next year. The unit replaces Bergey's current 10 kilowatt unit, producing twice the power with only a 10 percent increase in the total cost, he said.

"Our largest market now is Japan, and we think this will quadruple or more our exports to Japan," Bergey said.



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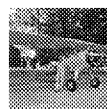


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The partnership grants require Bergey to contribute a portion of the research and development cost, but allows the company to keep the developed technology.

Bergey said the grant money will allow his company to compete with solar panel makers in China who have received billions of dollars from the Chinese government.

"We have lost a lot of competitiveness and market share to Chinese solar modules, which have flooded the country because they've dropped in price by about 75 percent over the last six years," he said. "The DOE funding is allowing us to develop technical improvements on the installation of our turbines, which will lower the costs and allow us to better compete."

The broader grant project is designed to lower the cost of distributed wind energy and to increase the number of distributed wind systems available to consumers, said Patrick Gillman, program manager for the Energy Department's Wind Energy Technologies Office.

"We think distributed wind has an important role to play in America's energy future," Gillman said. "It gives consumers control over their own energy use and allows them to make investments in reliable fixed-price power."

The grants typically are awarded to small businesses like Bergey, which has 28 employees and has operated in Norman for 40 years.

"These aren't global companies backed by billions in venture capital," Gillman said. "These are small businesses in the heartland that are making steps forward in partnership with us. We're proud of them and think the taxpayers can be proud as well."



Adam Wilmoth



Adam Wilmoth returned to The Oklahoman as energy editor in 2012 after working for four years in public relations. He previously spent seven years... [read more](#) ›

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Perry pursuing policy on coal, nuclear power at odds with Texas record

As multiple Texas coal plants wind down operations, U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry is pushing a widely decried proposal to subsidize coal and nuclear plants in the name of grid resiliency.

BY SHANNON NAJMABADI OCT. 20, 2017 9 HOURS AGO



Secretary of Energy Rick Perry testifies at a Committee on Energy and Commerce hearing in Washington, D.C. on Oct 12, 2017.

Screenshot/Committee on Energy and Commerce

An unusual coalition of fossil fuel interests, environmentalists and free-market adherents has criticized a proposal from U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry that would prop

up coal and nuclear plants across the country. And some of those familiar with Texas politics are wondering if the Perry that served as state governor for 14 years would have opposed the plan, too.

In a 2011 interview, then-Gov. Perry told blogger and radio host Erick Erickson, “Get rid of the tax loopholes, get rid of all of the subsidies. Let the energy industry get out there and find — the market will find the right energy for us to be using in this country.”

That statement was par the course for Perry, who as governor helped oversee the deregulation of Texas’ electrical sector and has championed competitive markets and opposed federal interference.

But to some, his views have shifted since he became President Donald Trump's Energy Secretary in March.

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“The boot is on the other foot,” Perry said at an event in April. “Are there issues that are so important to the national security of this country that the federal government can intervene on the regulatory side? I’ll suggest to you that there are.”

Perry raised eyebrows in September when he urged the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to give certain fuel sources what amounts to a subsidy, but one borne by consumers rather than the government. And at a hearing on Capitol Hill last week, Perry called the notion that there’s a free market in electrical generation a “fallacy.”

“We subsidize a lot of different energy sources. We subsidize wind energy, we subsidize ethanol, we subsidize solar, we subsidize oil and gas,” Perry said at the hearing. “Government’s picking winners and losers every day,” he said later.

Lawmakers on the committee were quick to point to the disparity between Perry's current position and those during his tenure leading Texas.

“It seems like with your new effort you are gaming the system and not doing what we did when you were governor in Texas,” U.S. Rep. Gene Green, D-Houston, said at one point.

U.S. Rep. Pete Olson, R-Sugar Land, warned Perry that he was creating the impression that “you prefer government control over the free markets.”

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“We both know that’s a pile of Bevo longhorn poo-poo,” Olson said.

Threat of energy outages

Perry's proposal says generators that can store 90 days' worth of fuel onsite — like coal and nuclear plants — should be shored up because they can keep the electric grid running in the event of a disturbance.

Many of these generators face premature retirement, Perry wrote last month. Referencing a 2014 "polar vortex" and the hurricanes that have battered Texas and other coastal areas, he said, “It is time for [FERC] to issue rules to protect the American people from the threat of energy outages.”

If approved, critics say the plan would increase residents' electricity bills, penalize other sources of energy and signify a break from FERC's free-market tendencies. Perry has asked the independent commission to make a decision on his recommendation in 60 days — a timeline some say is too fast.

But opponents have taken issue with more than the proposal's pace. A broad coalition has criticized the plan as an ineffective solution put on too hasty a path. Some criticize it as pollution-causing and backward-looking; others say it amounts to a bailout and argue against government putting its thumb on the scale.

Industrial Energy Consumers of America, a group that represents Koch Industries and is supportive of nuclear and coal power, penned a letter saying the proposal would “distort, if not destroy, competitive wholesale electricity markets.”

Pat Wood III, a former chairman of Texas' Public Utility Commission, expressed his antipathy in more colorful language, likening the plan to a “lovely little Christmas turd” while at an industry conference, according to news reports.

Perry “clearly is acting based on what his boss, Trump, would like him to do,” said Lenae Shirley, a senior director at the Environmental Defense Fund. “When institutes that represent the Koch brothers are aligning with environmentalists on this, that sends a pretty strong message that this is not the right move.”

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On the campaign trail, Trump promised to revive the coal industry, and his administration has already dismantled some policies favored by renewable energy advocates.

Even companies that support reforming wholesale electricity markets disagree with the specifics of Perry's proposal.

"DOE is saying we need to have fuel security in the event of some catastrophic failure of the transportation or natural gas systems," said Abraham Silverman, vice president and deputy general counsel at NRG Energy, which owns the retail electricity business of Reliant Energy in Houston. "That's not crazy."

"That said," he added, "we are not proponents of bailouts. We're not proponents of subsidies to targeted generators. We think the DOE was on the right path in highlighting the problems, but the specific proposal that they put forward was, I think, problematic."

"Good for American energy"

At last week's hearing, Perry said he's committed to an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy — and pointed to his "real track record" as governor. "But the wind doesn't always blow," he added. "The sun doesn't always shine. The gas pipelines, they can't guarantee every day that that supply is going to be there."

He suggested the Obama administration had been biased toward renewables and, in April, he commissioned a study to see if regulations, mandates or other tax policies are "responsible for forcing the premature retirement of baseload power plants" such as coal and nuclear generators.

That report, which had been highly anticipated by both members of the energy industry and environmentalists, noted 531 "coal generating units" closed across the country between 2002 and 2016 and laid most of the blame for those closures on the "advantaged economics of natural gas-fired generation" — with regulations and rising output from wind and solar energy as lesser factors. The study's authors did not find that such closures had made the grid unreliable.

That trend has been largely borne out in Texas, where Perry, as governor, helped oversee the deregulation of the state's electricity market. Under Perry, natural gas production surged thanks to technological advances like hydraulic fracturing, and Texas became the

nation's leader in wind energy generation. Data from the state's largest grid operator shows wind capacity grew from 116 megawatts in 2000 to more than 11,000 megawatts by 2014.

"If we go back in time, I'm sure we could find a dozen quotes from Gov. Perry very excited about these kinds of developments," said Chrissy Mann, a senior representative of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign.

Brandy Marty Marquez, one of the state's Public Utility commissioners who previously served in the governor's office as Perry's chief of staff, said Perry "probably was among the first people to coin the phrase 'all-of-the-above approach' because Texas is one of the early adopters of renewable energy, specifically wind."

While Perry long touted free-market principles as governor, he also championed spending millions in tax subsidies for firms relocating or expanding in Texas, programs critics derided as "corporate welfare." And as governor, he did push for the permitting of new coal plants while other states were scaling back amid pollution concerns.

But those facilities, or Perry's lobbying for them, weren't highlighted in a December 2016 op-ed from a former state regulator about why Perry becoming Trump's Energy Secretary would be "good for American energy."

Barry Smitherman, the former chairman of Texas' Public Utility Commission and Railroad Commission, cited the building of new transmission lines for wind energy, the encouragement of more competition in the electric market and the "shale revolution" as "three particular areas where Perry's leadership led to significant benefits for working Texans, energy consumers and the broader energy industry."

Coal plants closing

Marquez said Perry's proposal is a responsible and reasonable way to approach issues with the grid — and that he's consistently advocated for a diversified energy portfolio. Anybody surprised by his plan "hasn't been paying attention," she said. "He sent it over to FERC so that there can be a transparent dialogue, an open dialogue about it," she said.

But even if FERC adopts Perry's plan as is, it would largely not impact nuclear or coal-powered plants in Texas.

The Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the state's largest grid operator, is not under the purview of FERC. "Only action by the Texas legislature or the [Public Utility Commission] would affect our rate structure," said Robbie Searcy, an ERCOT spokesperson. Diverse energy sources, she added, have helped ERCOT maintain a reliable system and competitive market.

According to ERCOT data, coal made up 22 percent of the state's generation capacity last year. But the coming closure of several coal-powered plants in the state has set the stage for wind to overtake coal in Texas' overall energy mix in 2018, according to Joshua Rhodes, a research fellow at the University of Texas at Austin's Energy Institute.

Vistra Energy's subsidiary, Luminant, announced earlier this month that three of its Texas coal plants will shutter next year, if ERCOT gives the okay. In environmental groups' crosshairs for years, the Monticello, Big Brown and Sandow plants have earned the dubious distinction of being among the "dirtiest" in the country. But the plants succumbed to financial, not activists', pressure, according to company officials.

"The long-term economic viability of these plants has been in question for some time," Curt Morgan, president and CEO of Vistra, said in a statement. Because a few of the retiring plants were built in the 1970s, Rhodes said they probably needed some capital investment just to upgrade and maintain the facilities.

If ERCOT determines the plants aren't needed to keep the state's energy grid reliable, their retirements could prompt the elimination of more than 800 jobs.

"Coal's powered America for a long time," Mann, the environmental advocate said; but the closures align with Perry's proposal. Natural market forces — and for some, an inclination toward renewable sources — means "coal has to get phased out," Mann said. "Perry's report recognizes that and is looking for a way to artificially prop up a dying industry rather than finding ways to help transition communities that have relied on coal."

Bill Peacock, vice president of research at the conservative-leaning Texas Public Policy Foundation, said a better solution is to rid the market of subsidies, rather than adding more. "We support markets as a way to decide which fuel is best to meet the energy needs of America," he said. "To that extent, we don't believe in subsidies for wind or solar or coal or nuclear or natural gas. It's across the board. We're not trying to pick winners and losers and we don't think anybody else ought to either."

Disclosure: The Environmental Defense Fund, NRG Energy, Vistra Energy and the Texas Public Policy Foundation have been financial supporters of The Texas Tribune. A complete list of Tribune donors and sponsors can be viewed [here](#).

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Delivery alert until NaN

PNM renewable plan faces hurdles

By Kevin Robinson-Avila / Journal Staff Writer

Thursday, October 19th, 2017 at 3:53pm

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A New Mexico Public Regulation Commission hearing examiner is opposing Public Service Co. of New Mexico's plan to hire a local company to build 50 megawatts of new solar plants that PNM would own and operate.

The examiner, Carolyn Glick, has also rejected a PNM plan to amend its current contract to procure electricity from the Lightning Dock geothermal plant in southern New Mexico, increasing the amount purchased and extending the contract through 2042.

Those proposals are part of PNM's 2018 renewable energy procurement plan, submitted in June and discussed in September in a public hearing under Glick. PNM filed the plan to comply with the state Renewable Portfolio Standard, which requires public utilities to derive 20 percent of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020, up from 15 percent now.

But the Santa Fe environmental group New Energy Economy, PRC staff and the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority objected to PNM's solar procurement proposal, which calls for Albuquerque-based Affordable Solar to build five 10-MW plants as turnkey projects on land owned by PNM.

The utility chose Affordable through a request for proposals last spring that excluded bids by independent power producers to own plants on PNM's pre-selected sites. Those bidders instead were forced to offer separate sites with full transmission plans and a fixed price structure laid out in advance.

Opponents said that exclusion clause stacked the deck for PNM to choose turnkey projects with Affordable that the utility itself could own and run. In addition, they said the RFP's 31-day limit on responses made it difficult for independent producers to submit alternative, third-party power purchase agreements to PNM.

The hearing examiner agreed, calling PNM's RFP process "unfair and uncompetitive."

"PNM failed to show, as required, that the Affordable Solar project is PNM's most cost effective solar resource procurement among available alternatives because the 2017 RFP process did not give (power purchase agreement) bidders a fair opportunity to participate and compete," Glick wrote in her recommendation to PRC commissioners this week.

The five commissioners must rule on PNM's plan before the end of November.

Glick also rejected the proposal to amend the Lightning Dock contract. She said the utility didn't consider potentially cheaper alternatives, including a separate bid by another provider in 2016 to offer geothermal power to the utility.

On the other hand, Glick did recommend that commissioners accept PNM's proposal to extend its current power purchase agreement for electricity from NextEra's Wind Energy Center in eastern New Mexico by 17 years, following facility upgrades to increase output.

PNM says it will appeal Glick's recommendation to reject the Lightning Dock and Affordable solar contracts.

"These initiatives clearly benefit customers, the environment, local communities and the state as a whole," said PNM spokesman Pahl Shipley in an email to the Journal. "...PNM plans to file strong exceptions to the hearing examiner's recommendations next week."

Contact the writer:



What's a prairie doing in the middle of the Medical Center?

'Pocket prairies' provide a range of health and ecological services

Jaime González, for the Houston Chronicle | October 19, 2017



Photo: Jaime Gonzalez

IMAGE 1 OF 9

An aerial view of the MD Anderson Prairie in the Med Center.

Walking through the core of Houston's world-famous Texas Medical Center, something at the corner of Holcombe and Fannin might feel out of place and time: what appears to be a giant weed patch.

As you approach this oddity, you will likely ask yourself, "Who let this happen?" or "Did the mowers just run out of gas?" or "Who forgot to pay the landscaping bill?"

Then it begins.

You hear the gentle, relaxing hum of crickets and see migratory birds bounding in and out of the grasses. You spot monarch butterflies alighting on colorful Texas wildflowers, sipping nectar that will help fuel their journey to México.

The pulse and vitality of life found here will lower your blood pressure and bring a sense of calm. Visit during a storm and you'll notice the rainwaters being sucked into the earth. Stop by in the spring, when the bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush are in bloom, and you'll observe folks snapping photos as though they were in Brenham or Chappell Hill.

Welcome to the MD Anderson Cancer Center's award-winning urban pocket prairie, one embedded in a concrete jungle.



Photo: Jaime Gonzalez

The MD Anderson Prairie in spring.

Houston's hardest-working habitat

What is a pocket prairie? It's is a small piece of land bursting with native grasses and wildflowers that are found on the prairie.

Pocket prairies can be the size of a bathtub or many acres wide. The key is that no matter their size, these prairies are a tiny example of the vast and grand coastal prairie that once blanketed the majority of Houston and the Texas Gulf Coast. This habitat has rapidly disappeared due to its ease of development, its value to agriculture and its invasion by nonnative species.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE: How to fight Houston flooding with plants

Prairies are Houston's blue-collar habitat. Why? Our prairies have fed us (corn, rice, cattle), clothed us (cotton) and soaked up millions of gallons of floodwaters during recent storms. They quietly feed native wildlife and cattle, clean the air and provide seasonal color.

And they also give us a sense of place by connecting us to our history. In an age of strip malls, rootlessness and detachment, prairies help tie us to the rodeo, barbecue, country music and other touchstones of Texan identity.



Photo: Jaime Gonzalez

Pocket prairies can provide habitat for wildlife.

They do all this without asking for the kind of praise showered on snowy mountains, majestic forests or clear-running streams. Humble, resilient, hard-working: What more could you ask for?

A constellation of pocket prairies

The MD Anderson Prairie is a shining example of the value of an urban pocket prairie. This 1.7-acre gem provides much-needed mental relaxation to physicians, nurses, caregivers, families and patients challenged by cancer care.

You will see folks simply sitting and watching, walking around the well-groomed trail and unfurling their minds, if just for a brief moment.

This prairie is also thrifty. It needs but one mowing per year, in contrast with nearby lawns that require up to 42. It doesn't require extra watering. It needs only four maintenance events a year.

And this prairie is notable, but not unique. We are in the midst of a renaissance with pocket prairies popping up on college campuses (UH, UHD, University of St. Thomas and soon Rice University), on church lands, in schoolyards and in prominent city parks.

Katy Prairie Conservancy, a local nonprofit, has been at the vanguard of this movement since 2010 and has worked with dedicated partners to return prairie to Hermann Park after an absence of more than 50 years.



Photo: Flo Hannah

A boy explores the pocket prairie in the Med Center.

The conservancy has also helped start more than 25 school prairies in five school districts and on college campuses and has provided guidance for restorations in some of Houston's other signature parks, including Buffalo Bayou Park.



Ada, OK: This Brilliant Company Is Disrupting A \$200 Billion Industry

EVERQUOTE

LAND MANAGEMENT: *Raising beef and saving birds on the Katy Prairie*

Why is a group like the conservancy, primarily charged with saving the coastal prairie west of Houston, interested in establishing pocket prairies? It's simple: To bring all the benefits of the prairie to where people need them the most. This movement, once just an ember, is set to become a bright blaze, eventually featuring ribbons of prairies along our power lines and flourishing in new natural areas created by buyouts.

As Houstonians reimagine a post-Harvey city, it's important to ask: "How can we build a more resilient city that is also in tune with nature and history?"

Pocket prairies are a down payment on that future.

Juime González is the community conservation director for the Katy Prairie Conservancy and the co-founder of the Coastal Prairie Partnership. Have a question about pocket prairies? Email jgonzalez@katyprairie.org.

TRANSLATOR

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GRAY MATTERS



Why I craved crosswords in prison

What's a prairie doing in the middle of the Medical

Center?